

Place: Lurgan Baptist: 7:11:2010

Reading: Revelation 3:7-13

THE GOOD, THE BAD, & THE LUKEWARM

7. THE FAITHFUL CHURCH

I am told that there are three massive doors that lead into the Cathedral of Milan. Above each door is an inscription. Above the door to the left is a carved wreath of roses and these words, *“All that which pleases is but for the moment.”* Above the door to the right is a carved cross and the inscription, *“All that which troubles is but for a moment.”* Over the centre door are the words, *“That only is important which is eternal.”* The church at Philadelphia may have been small, but what was important to them was the eternal. They were little, but God was with them, in them and on them. Now of all the seven churches if I could have chosen the church I would have attended it would have been the church at Philadelphia, which is modern Alasehir in Turkey. If I could have attended only one service I would like to have been present at the service in which this letter was read to the congregation. I mean they had probably heard of the open letters that Christ had written.

They were possibly nervous having just found out that their neighbour Sardis had been called *a dead church*. I'm sure many were wondering as the secretary of the church nervously opened the letter, *“I wonder what the Lord Jesus has to say about us ?”* But this church

had nothing to fear. For Christ had only words of commendation for this precious little fellowship. Philadelphia is linked with Smyrna as the two church churches for whom Christ had not a single word of criticism. Indeed this church was like a rose between two thorns, on the one side was Sardis a *dead church*, on the other side was Laodicea a *disinterested church*, but here at Philadelphia was a *dedicated church*. Our Lord's letter to them was without compliant or condemnation. In essence He wrote to them and said, *“Little is much when God is in it.”* Now there are several things about this city that we need to note for undoubtedly they have a bearing on the Lord's remarks here.

1. Consider It's Historical Background:

It was founded by Attalus the second in 140 BC and Attalus was called Philadelphos which means brotherly love, it was after him that Philadelphia was named. Now Attalus had built this city for one main reason, that it might become a missionary city. It was intended that the function of Philadelphia might be to spread the Greek culture, language and civilisation. What the city had been for Greek Culture, the church was to be for the Christian Gospel.

2. Consider ITS GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION:

The location of this city was significant. There are three important considerations in the sale of property, *location, location, location*. Philadelphia had all three. Because of its location 25 miles southeast of Sardis, this city was a major hub of communication, disseminating information throughout this part of the

known world. Ancient travellers would pass through Philadelphia on their way to important destinations. As the “***Gateway to the East***,” it was ideally situated to touch the lives of many people. No doubt it was that Christ was thinking about when He said “*I have set before thee an open door.*” (3:8) However, Philadelphia also set on a geological fault that made the city vulnerable to volcanoes and earthquakes. In AD 17 this city was devastated. In the following years the city continued to be jolted by aftershocks. So much so that many of the residents moved out permanently to live in the surrounding fields for fear of being buried alive. The Risen Lord’s promise to the over-comer was “*He shall go no more out.*” (3:12)

3. Consider ITS SPIRITUAL CHURCH:

This was a revival church. It had experienced an ***Evangelical revival***, it had a world vision. It had experienced an ***Ecclesiastical revival***, the deadening influence of Judaism had been overcome. It had experienced an ***Eschatological revival***. The truth of the Lord’s Return was its beacon light. Thus the Risen Lord stands before this fellowship not to ***offer blame but blessing, not the threat of a fearful vengeance but the thrill of a fresh vision.*** In this letter there are three symbols, “**a key**,” (3:7) “**a door**,” (3:8) “**a pillar**,” (3:12) We want to examine the relationship between the *Church’s open door, the Lord’s master key and the over-comers heavenly pillar.*

(1) The Opportunity that lay Before this Church

“*I have set before thee an open door,*” (3:8) In this

context “*door*,” is used figuratively as the opportunity for service and ministry. An “*open door*,” is a God-given opportunity for expanded ministry. I heard about two shoe salesmen who went to Africa to open new sales territories. Three days after they arrived, one salesman faxed a message home. “*I will be returning home on the next plane. I can’t sell shoes here. Everyone goes barefooted.*” A fax was received from the other salesman. “*Send all the shoes you can. Prospects unlimited. Nobody has shoes.*” Each day we are given opportunities but we don’t always recognise them. Now think of this “*open door*,”

(a) HISTORICALLY:

“*I have set before thee an open door,*” (3:8) Paul was aware of open doors divinely placed before him. The apostle writes, “*For a great door and effectual is opened unto me.*” (1 Cor 16:9) Later he wrote, “*When I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord.*” (2 Cor 2:12) Paul requested prayer “*that God would open to us a door of utterance.*” (Col 4:3) Why when he reached the city of Rome and was for two years held captive “*in his own hired house,*” he spoke of Christ to all who visited him. (Acts 28:30) Now remember Philadelphia was strategically placed. It was “*The gateway to the East*,” ideally situated to touch the lives of many people and the Risen Lord says to this church, “*I have open door.*” The opportunity, to spread the good news of the gospel. And this “*open door*,” of service which was a reality in the past, is a reality in the present. My having gone through the door of

salvation we must hurry through the door of service to look for others and in the words of Christ, “*compel them,*” to come in Mark Guy Pearce says, “*Unless our faith saves us out of selfishness into service, it will certainly never save us out of hell into heaven.*” Have you ever considered the fact that witnessing and serving is simply walking through doors that God has opened? Did you know that when you get an opportunity to witness to someone, it’s not because you were slick or persuasive or just because you were in the right place at the right time. It’s because the Risen Lord opened that door. Now when someone opens a door and you refuse to walk through it, that often is a matter of *courtesy*. But when Christ opens a door, and you refuse to go through it, it becomes a matter of *commitment*. My what strategic opportunity has the Lord opened for you? Have you stepped out by faith and gone through it? (a)

(b) PROPHETICALLY:

You see, “*Prophetically,*” (1:3) the Philadelphia church represents the period from 1700-1900. It suggests the era of revival and missions. The great champions of this period were Jonathan Edward’s, (1703- 1758) one of America’s greatest preachers and theologians. John Wesley, (1703-1791) The founder of the Methodist Church and one of England’s greatest sons. George Whitefield, (1714- 1770) William Carey, (1761-1834) David Livingstone, (1813-1873) D.L.Moody, (1837-1899) George Mueller, and C.H. Spurgeon. (1834- 1892) My it was during this era that God brought the church back to Himself

and thrust it forth to reach a lost world. Spirit filled servants of Christ went forth through the countries like firebrands of the Lord calling upon sinners to repent and saints to awaken. This was revival in the church and for this church the Risen Lord has nothing but praise. But think of this “*open door,*” not only (a) (b)

(c) SPECIFICALLY:

For it was to this church at Philadelphia that the Lord says, “*I have set before thee an open door and no man can shut it,*” (3:8) Now there is a cause and effect principle at work here. Another rendering of (3:8) reads, “*I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut Because you have a little power and have kept My Word and not denied My name.*” The Lord opened a door for this church because this church had fulfilled certain conditions. They were faithful in little. So God gave them opportunity to be faithful in much. Now,

(1) The Fellowship was Small:

Do you see what the Lord says? “*Thou hast a little strength.*” (3:8) Compared to the other churches, they have only a little power, limited resources, small numbers, and little clout. It did not have carpet on the floor, padded pews or chandeliers hanging from the ceiling. It was a small church but it had a big heart. Theodore Roosevelt owned a little dog that was always getting into fights and always getting beaten up. On one occasion this little dog tackled a big lump of dog and took the beating of his life. Someone said to Teddy

Roosevelt, “ *Mr. President, your dog isn’t much of a fighter.*” The President replied,, “ *Oh, he’s a great fighter, he’s just a poor judge of dogs.*” My that reminds me of the church at Philadelphia. It was small on the outside but it had a great heart on the inside. Indeed the Lord commends them for they were,

1. Loyal to the Scriptures:

“ *And hast kept My Word,*” (3:8) When under attack the assembly had shown their adherence to the teachings of the Word. This was a Bible-believing, a Bible-teaching, a Bible obeying church. They wouldn’t budge from the Word. *Do we not need more churches like this today ?* For too many have fallen victims to the latest gimmicks of some church growth guru. But what we need instead is a return to the centrality of the Word of God. Just keep the Word.

2. Loyal to the Saviour:

“ *And hast not denied My name.*” (3:8 2:13) They were not only true to the Scripture they were true to the Saviour. You see, they knew that if you deny the Scriptures you ultimately degrade the Saviour. Even though it was not a popular thing to do, even though it could cost their lives they remained unashamed of the name of Christ and would not buckle under worldly pressure. *No wonder Christ opened doors for this church.* They were faithful in little so God gave them opportunity to be faithful in much. Sometimes people reason, “ *if the Lord would only make me a successful businessman, than I’d give the church a lot of money.*” But the real issue is this. “ *What are you doing with the money you have now ?*” Our faithfulness with the little

God gives us determines how we handle greater opportunities. My do you recognise that faithfulness in little things is God’s appointed way to bigger things ? (Matt 25:21) It was to this little church that Christ said, “ *I have set before thee an open door.*” (1)

(2) The Foe was Strong:

Do you recall it was Jews who were causing trouble at Smyrna. (2:9) Well, they were at again in Philadelphia. Now what was happening was this. These unbelieving Jews were persecuting the church, slandering them and spreading vicious lies. And the Risen Lord says, “ *I know ,*” (3:8) The Saviour Himself had been the target of Satan’s synagogue during the days of His earthly ministry. Do you recall it was the religious Pharisees who levelled the greatest hatred against the Lord Jesus. Despite their claims to be true sons of Abraham, Christ told them, “ *Ye are of your father the devil.*” (Jn 8:44) Here He says, “ *You’re the synagogue of Satan.*” Same message. Different group. Paul discovered that, “ *a great and effectual door is open unto me and there are many adversaries.*” (1 Cor 16:9) **Opportunities and Obstacles.** Unbelief says, “ *the obstacles are too great. It costs too much. It’ll never work. We’ve never done it that way before.*” But faith says, “ *here’s an open door let’s go through it.*” The Chinese word for crisis is a combination of symbols for “ *danger,*” plus “ *opportunity.*” Is that not the way it is in God’s work ? Opportunity usually comes in the face of crisis and danger. (1) (2)

(3) The Future was Severe:

Look if you will at (3:10) The *Immediate* reference here may be to the official Roman persecutions that would come at any time, *but the Ultimate reference is to Universal Tribulation*. My there is coming a time of worldwide upheaval the like of which has never been known in human history. The Bible calls this period, **The day of the Lord:** (Joel 2:1) **The**

Indignation:

(Is 26:20) **The time of Jacob's trouble:** (Jer 30:7)

The seventieth week: (Dan 9:24-27) **The great day of His wrath:** (Rev 6:17) **The Tribulation:**

(Matt 24:21 29) John describes this time in (Ch's 6-18) of this book. The question is often asked.

“ Will the church go through the tribulation ?” Are we looking for tribulation or translation ? Are we looking for Antichrist or Jesus Christ ? In this connection

(3:10) is interesting. The Greek phrase translated “ *keep from,* ” does not mean “ *to preserve through something.* ” Rather it means to “ *preserve from, to protect from, to keep out of. To preserve outside the sphere of something.* ” The Risen Lord is saying that He will **protect** the Church by keeping them away from it.

In fact as (3:11) reminds us the Lord will remove us from the earth before this period begins. My we are not going through but we are going up. We are not looking for tribulation we are looking for glorification. Paul says, “ *For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout,* ” (1 Thes 4:16-17) My in light of the Lord's near return is it not a time for

evangelism ? Is not a time for reaching out to lost ones ? Is not a time to go through that door of opportunity that the Lord has opened for you ? (1)

(2) The Authority that lay Behind this Church

For in (3:7) the Risen Lord says, “ *These things saith he that is holy he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth, and shutteth, and no man openeth.* ” Now in this self-description the Lord Jesus does something unique. This is the only church to whom Christ identifies Himself in a way not previously revealed in John's vision of (Ch 1) This is because the vision of Christ was mostly a vision of judgment. But as Christ speaks to this church, He has no complaint or criticism, only commendation. So, an encouraging picture of Christ is revealed here instead. You see, behind this little fellowship was all the *Authority of the Risen Lord*. And who is this Risen Lord ? He is One who is,

(a) PURE IN CHARACTER:

“ *He that is Holy.* ” (3:7) “ *Holy,* ” describes what is free from sin, its an attribute of deity. (4:8 6:10) The concept of holiness comes from a Semitic root meaning, “ *to cut.* ” To be holy is to be a cut above. Separate. Set apart. My everything about the Lord Jesus is *Holy*. He was *Holy at His Birth*, “ *That holy thing the Son of God.* ” (Lk 1:35) *Holy in His Life*, “ *The Holy One of God.* ” (Mk 1:24) *Holy at His Death*, “ *Neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption.* ” (Acts 2:27) *Holy in His Present Priestly Office*,

“ *For such an high priest became us who is Holy.*”
(Heb 7:26) Majestic in His glory. Radiant in His splendour. Nothing can be compared to Him. He is the incomparable Christ. (a)

(b) PERFECT IN CONDUCT:

“ *He that is true.*” (3:7) That is genuine. (alethinos) It means He is authentic or genuine. He not only tells the truth, He is truth. You see, a man can be truthful and yet not be true. I heard about a man who lived next door to a habitual liar. He just lied all of the time. One day this friend got it enough of it and he said, “ *Would you just tell me one thing and promise me that you are telling the absolute truth.*” He said, “ *yes, what I’m about to tell you right now is the absolute truth.*” His neighbour said alright, “ *What is it ?*” He said, “ *I never tell the truth.*” You see, unlike many Christ not only tells the truth He is the truth. The difference between us and Christ is this. We try to practice what we preach, but Christ preached what He practised.

(c) POWERFUL IN CONTROL:

He is **Sovereign**. “ *He that hath the key of David*” (3:8) Keys in the Bible represent authority and power. That means Christ is the Keeper of the Keys who alone opens and shuts the door leading to God’s blessings. Oh, think of the authority of the Risen Lord for He,

1. Provides for Saints:

“ *He that hath the key of David.*” (3:8) The Scripture referred to here is (Is 22:22) There we are told that

Eliakim had been given the key to the house of David. . Eliakim was the guardian of King Hezekiah’s treasures. He alone possessed the keys to open the royal treasure vault. In just the same way the Lord Jesus has been handed the keys of heavens treasury by God the Father. He has the resources and wherewithal to meet all our needs. Did Paul not say, “ *But my God shall supply*” (Phil 4:19) Dr. Vance Havner says, “ *We will always have all we will need, to do all that God wants us to do, as long as He wants us to do it.*” Now why would the Lord Jesus reveal Himself this way to this church ? Because they had little strength, and few resources. Do we need to be reminded that the strength of this church does not lie in its size but in its God ? Spiritual success is not dictated by the size of the church’s buildings, budgets, or buses, its determined by having great faith in a big God. My it does not matter how big or small the church is, what matters is how big is your God. You see, the Risen Lord 1.

2. Permits for Servants:

“ *He that openeth*” (3:8) Now do the **Messengers** of the Church not need to hear this ? Of course we do. My we must spend less time recommending ourselves to others and more time showing ourselves approved to God. The Lord of the open door can open doors for you that no man can shut.. But do the **Members** of the Church not need to hear this ? If Christ is the “ *One who opens*” then don’t your barge your way through doors that are still closed. Be patient and wait till Christ takes out the key and opens the door for you for He is still in control. (1) (2)

(3) The Security that lay Beyond this Church

Christ says in (3:11) “ *Behold I come quickly*,” This is the coming of Christ to the air for His church. (Jn 14:3) Is this not our hope ? The Coming of the Lord, but how awful that moment will be if we have not been faithful. So the Risen Lord closes this sweet letter with words of encouragement. (2:12) So there is,

(a) *The Prospect of Being a Pillar Then:*

What ? A pillar. Who ? You who have little strength. Where ? “ *In the temple of my God.*” (3:12) You who were persecuted by the synagogue of Satan. Could anything be more appropriate ? Do you recall that Philadelphia, was set on a fault line near the epicentre of the massive earthquake of A.D.17. The slightest tremor in that city sent the citizens scurrying out of town. But in heaven, “ *they shall go out no more,*” (3:12) but will stand as pillars, secure, immovable, stable and safe. Eternally secure, never to leave the presence of God. Does that not thrill your soul ? But that’s not all. For Christ promises, “ *And I will write upon Him the name of My God.*” (3:12) That’s **Ownership**. Christ adds, “ *I will write upon him the name of the city.*” (3:12) That’s **Citizenship**. Over-comers will receive all the rights of citizenship in the new Jerusalem. (Rev 21-22) Finally, Christ promises, “ *I will write upon him My new name.*” That will culminate in **Worship**. This symbolises the full revelation of His

Divine Person. There are mysteries of beauty, of brilliance, and of blessing in Jesus not yet revealed to a wondering universe. What the Queen of Sheba said to Solomon we will say to the Lord, “ *Behold the half was not told me.*” (1 Kings 10:7) For “ *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard neither hath entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.*” (1 Cor 2:9) (a) But think of,

(b) *The Purpose of Being a Pilgrim Now:*

“ *Strangers and pilgrims,*” (1 Pet 2:11) is that not how Peter describes us ? A stranger has no home, a fugitive is running away from home, a pilgrim is going home. But he is going home with assurance for he has lived for the eternal and not the temporal. The gospel was his motivation, the glory is his habitation. (1) (2) (3) My do you what the 6th mark of a living church is ? **Opportunity**. “ *But Lord, our resources are small. The opposition is great. Lord, lets not do anything rash. Let’s wait until the circumstances become more favourable.*” My let me ask you, how big is your God ?

On May 31st 1792 William Carey preached his famous message in Nottingham, England. His text was (Is 54:2) “ *Enlarge the place of thy tent and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations, spare not, lengthen thy cords and strengthen thy stakes.*” He packed his message into two great headings, “ **Expect great things from God attempt great things for God.**” Carey said, “ *The Divine way out of failure and disgrace is a wider vision and bolder programme.*” He pleaded for action. His message so touched the hearts

of those listening that a Missionary Society was formed which awoke the church from the lethargy of a 1000 years. William Carey became its first missionary.

The Risen Lord says to you this, "*I have set before thee an open door.*" (3:8) Will you go through it ?

“ Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God.” Carey did. Will you ?